

## University of Texas Bulletin

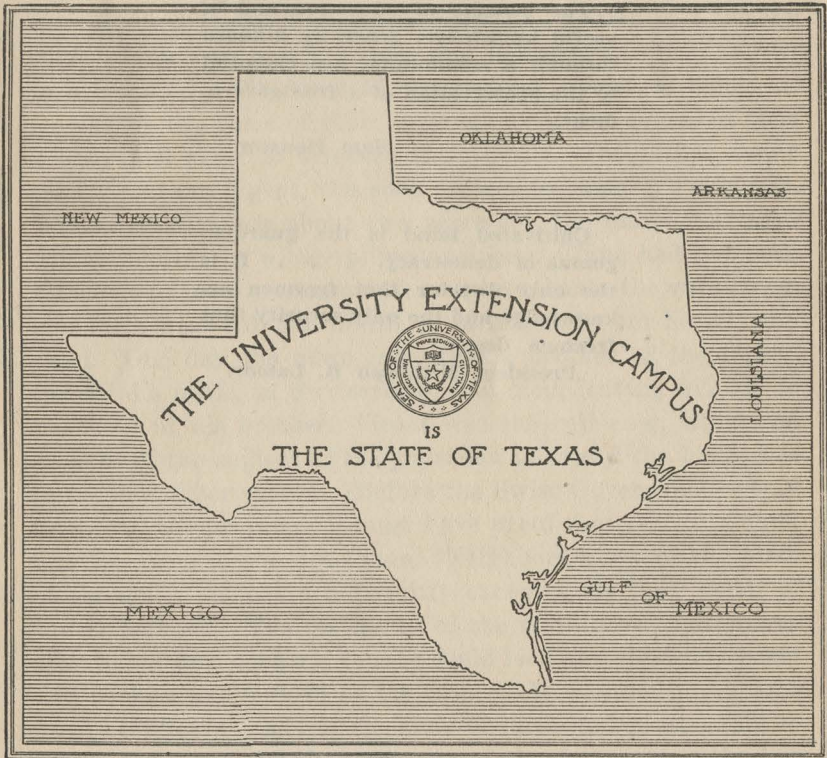
No. 1709: February 10, 1917

### WHY REGISTER BIRTHS AND REPORT CASES OF SICKNESS?

Prepared by

THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTENSION OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

*BABY HEALTH IS TEXAS' WEALTH*



**The benefits of education and of useful knowledge, generally diffused through a community, are essential to the preservation of a free government.**

**Sam Houston**

**Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy. . . . It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire.**

**President Mirabeau B. Lamar.**

## WHY REGISTER BIRTHS AND REPORT CASES OF SICKNESS?

**Why Register Births?**—There is at the present time a great deal of misunderstanding on the matter of birth registration. The birth of the baby should be registered because:

1. It establishes the parentage.
2. It establishes the age.
3. It identifies the individual.
4. It gives to the state information of great value, through which many lives are saved.

Let us consider these one at a time.

The value of birth registration as a means of establishing a right to inherit property is shown by the following: "A young man and wife came from Switzerland and settled in a nearby state. They were hardy, honest, and industrious. They settled in a county by the name of Switzerland, doubtless being attracted by the name of their home-land. In the course of time a baby girl came to brighten their home. The father, being thrifty and intelligent, was soon made a foreman in a saw-mill. When his child was about two years old, the father was accidentally killed by a log rolling over him. Time had not been sufficient for him to accumulate property, hence the wife struggled with wash-tub and needle to earn a living for herself and child. One day the news came that a brother of the father, the child's uncle, in Switzerland, had died, leaving \$12,000 to the issue of his brother. Great was the rejoicing, which, on account of the neglect of the physician to record the birth, was to become bitter sorrow. Before the Swiss Government would turn over the property, it must have proof that the little child was the issue of the dead man. Neighbors knew of the birth of the child, but could not testify except as to their belief of the fatherhood. The testimony of the mother was not admissible in her own country, for she could lead any child into court and declare any man to be the father. It was the physician's birth certificate, made at the time of birth and presumably in the presence and by the authority of the father, that the law demanded. It could not be produced, and the helpless infant

that the physician should have been eager to protect and serve, lost its inheritance." Many cases like this could be cited, and many an heir has lost an inheritance simply because of the failure to have his birth registered. While it is the duty of physicians to register births, all parents should see to it that their children's births are properly recorded.

The compulsory education law will compel all children to go to school until the age of fourteen, and many times a copy of the registration will be needed to prove that the individual has or has not passed the age limit and is or is not exempt from this law.

A copy of the birth certificate may be needed when applying for a position, especially under civil service. It may be needed to establish a man's right to vote or hold office. The North Carolina Health Bulletin, November, 1915, says: "A young man who was born in Raleigh about thirty years ago, and who is now with the Ford Motor Company, Newark, N. J., writes the State Board of Health for whatever aid they can give to help him produce a birth certificate. He says: 'I must have my birth certificate and want to know how I can secure the same. I was born in Raleigh, August 17, 1885. My father's name was . . . ; my mother's name was . . . . Being employed by the Ford Motor Company necessitates my having a birth certificate before they will allow me to share in the profits, as all Mr. Ford's employes do.' " The article does not state if the certificate could be furnished, but says: "In this case, if this man fails to get a certified record of his birth, he will be denied the privileges of profit sharer in the company of which he is an employe."

That a birth certificate is of value when traveling is shown by the the following, taken from the "Florida Health Notes," November, 1914:

"His Life Depends on Proving Birthplace.

"American in London in Danger of Being Shot as Spy  
if He Cannot Satisfy Authorities.

"New York, November 17.—In an effort to save the life of Joseph Ullman, a wealthy furrier under sentence of death in London as a German spy, attempts were made to find his birth

certificate by means of which his American citizenship might be established. Records show no entry, however. Steps were then taken to find the record of the death of his mother, who died at Ullman's birth, and two citizens who knew Ullman's parents. It is feared, however, that Ullman's citizenship cannot be proven and that he must die. British authorities have given Ullman two weeks to prove his American citizenship, it is said. If it cannot be established that he was a native of this city, the State Department, it is said, will take steps in his behalf.

“ ‘Joseph Ullman, his friends say, is head of the firm of that name, with offices in New York, London, Paris, and St. Paul. Early this year he went to London to build up the business of the firm there, but since the war broke out nothing has been heard until a brother in this city learned of his predicament.’ ”

For years a record of the birth has been kept of horses, cattle, and sheep by residents of this State, and many times the birth report has been sent to other States for record. Have these same citizens been as careful to see that the births of their children were recorded? To illustrate, the following incident is related of a farmer who left his valuable estate in trust to his unthrifty son, to go to his granddaughter on her twenty-first birthday. The girl had been told that the date of her birth was on a certain day of the month and year, and always celebrated the day as her birthday. The time came when she believed she was twenty-one, and therefore claimed her inheritance. Her father denied her age, saying she was only nineteen. The family Bible was appealed to, but the leaf containing the family record was gone. No record had been rendered, and the attending physician was dead. The court was in a quandary. A Solomon was needed for judgment. At last a neighbor remembered that a valuable cow belonging to the grandfather had given birth to a calf on the day the girl was born, and he could swear to it. Perhaps the grandfather had recorded the date of the birth of the calf. His farm books showed this to be the case. The date of the birth of the human being was thus established.

The recording of births is also of value to the state because it shows the natural increase, and by that knowledge may

protect the infants. In some of the Eastern cities a representative of the health department visits every home from which a birth is reported, and this is unquestionably of great value to the infant in many instances, for the conditions found are recorded and if it is deemed necessary, subsequent visits are made, and where assistance or advice is needed, it is given. Without registration this is impossible.

It is the duty of all parents to be sure that the births of their children are a matter of record. Unless this is done, some of the children may have cause to regret that their parents neglected their duty to them.

**Why Report Cases of Sickness?**—In order to control certain diseases, it is necessary that the location of each case be known, so that others need not be exposed to the infection. There is no question but that every parent would want any case of diphtheria occurring in the community reported in order that his or her children might be protected. Ought not these same parents to be as ready to report a case when it occurs in one of their children in order that others may be protected? Many times lives are lost because of failure to report disease promptly or failure to properly obey the quarantine.

Rule 9 of the Sanitary Code for Texas is as follows: "It shall be the duty of all persons infected with any contagious diseases, or who, from exposure to contagion from such disease, may be liable to endanger others who may come in contact with them, to strictly observe such instructions as may be given them by any health authority of the State, in order to prevent the spread of such contagious disease, and it shall be lawful for such health authorities to command any person thus infected or exposed to infection to remain within designated premises for such length of time as such authority may deem necessary." The Sanitary Code not only makes it obligatory upon the physician to report certain diseases, but Rule 23 makes it obligatory upon every hotel proprietor, keeper of a boarding house or inn, and householder or head of family in a house wherein any case of a reportable contagious disease may occur, to report to the local health officer within twelve hours of his or her first

knowledge of the nature of such disease unless previous notice has been given by the physician in attendance.

This law is of benefit and should be faithfully observed by all. Unless the health authorities know where the cases are, they cannot protect the community from disease.

Every parent should know that the birth of every one of his or her children is registered, and all should insist that all cases of reportable disease are reported early, and all quarantinable diseases quarantined as long as danger of spread exists. Remember that this latter period must be judged by the health officer, whose duty it is to protect the community.



